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SUBJECT: ZANZIBAR: MEMORIES OF AN UNRECONSTRUCTED REVOLUTIONARY

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¶1. SUMMARY: Ali Sultani was one of the leading figures of the 1964 Zanzibar Revolution, but later spent eight years in prison as one of the conspirators of President Karume's assassination (father of the current President Karume). A charismatic raconteur, quoting Edith Pilaf's "Je Ne Regrete Rien," he is outspoken and angry about the present state of Zanzibar. He hopes for political change, yet sees little difference between ruling party CCM and opposition CUF. He would like to see a Zanzibar government of unity "so we can at last fight for an independent nation and fulfill the goals of our revolution." END SUMMARY.

¶2. Over bottles of Tusker beer and too many cigarettes (he smokes L&Ms, which he laughingly says stands for "Lenin and Marx"), Ali Sultani gold-panned nuggets of Zanzibari and Cold War history from a swirling stream of Swahili, English and Spanish (the later language, of the 11 he knows, including Russian and Chinese, he picked up in an Argentine jail, where he spent 11 days in 1954, when as a student on Spring Break he was involved in a seaport barroom brawl).

OLD ZANZIBAR

¶3. Ali Sultani related to ZAO a story that begins with his maternal grandmother's first marriage to Sultan Ali ibn Hamud (1902-1911), whom some say was deposed by the British for "decadent ways." However, the version as told by Ali Sultani was that the Sultan (an Eton grad) fell from favor when he asked the British High Commissioner while in the company of other high-level notables, to assist him, the Sultan, in tying his shoes. Ali Sultani also said that Sultan Hamud was the first Zanzibari monarch to form relations with Italy (viz UK and Germany, the principal powers jockeying for hegemony during that era), and this also evoked suspicions. En route to King Edward V's coronation in 1911, Ali Sultani was delayed in Paris. Back home, the British engineered a new Sultan to take his place, Hamud's brother-in-law, Sultan Khalifa ibn Kharub (1911-1960). Sultan Hamud died in Paris in 1918, while Ali Sultani's grandmother meanwhile remarried. From her second marriage came Ali Sultani's mother, who wed a prominent Arab-Indian businessman from the island of Pemba. Ali Sultani was born in Pemba but moved to the main island of Unguja as a small child.

¶4. Ali Sultani's childhood best friend was Abdulrahma Mohamed Babu (who became Secretary General of Zanzibar's first political party, the Zanzibar National Party, leader of the Zanzibar revolution and a renowned Pan-Africanist), although Babu was five years his senior. Ali Sultani and Babu were neighbors, and Ali Sultani said Babu's mother made the best version of "matandu" he ever ate (matandu is a dish of scorched rice with coconut that some people throw out, but

many consider a delicacy). Evidently Babu's mother was always burning rice, and the young Ali Sultani was always at the back door to eat it. Ali Sultani said he ate more meals at his neighbor's than in his own house. When Babu went to England on a scholarship in 1952, Ali Sultani, still a teen, tried to follow him. Ali Sultani hired himself out as a deckhand and worked his way around the world, finally joining his companion, becoming roommates, and later enrolling in college classes.

BIRTH OF A COMMUNIST

15. One day in the mid-1950's, the two young Zanzibari students were passing by Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park and heard an impassioned speech by a man from the British Communist Party. The speaker talked of liberating Africa from the "imperialist oppressors," a theme that had resonance with the young Ali Sultani, despite his patrician upbringing. Ali Sultani joined the BCP shortly thereafter. For his part, Babu later joined the British Labor Party ("Babu was a true anarchist, not a Communist, so he always went with the liberal establishment to push it from within, even up to and after the Zanzibar Revolution," explained Ali Sultani).

16. In 1957 Ali Sultani paid his own way to attend a Global Youth Conference in the USSR, where he met and befriended what became the pantheon of African anti-colonial revolutionaries: (Banda, Nkomo, Kaunda, Lumumba, etc.). Ali Sultani returned to Zanzibar in 1958 fully versed in dialectic materialism with a steadfast belief in the "scientific approach" to history and society. He immediately became an organizer for, and senior member of, the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP), from which he later founded a sub-sect of Communists

DAR ES SAL 00000127 002 OF 004

called the "Umma ("People's") Party." Ali Sultani claims he was one of the principal ideologues for the ouster of the Sultan of the short-lived independent nation of Zanzibar.

17. Ali Sultani says that as a ZNP official, he knew well resident U.S. diplomat Carl Petersen. However, he said his closest U.S. contact was with then-Consul Frank Carlucci, with whom he became a confidant. In mid-1964, Ali Sultani was sent to be Commissar for Pemba to consolidate the revolution there post-Okello (a Ugandan and main instigator of the violent anti-Arab uprising targeting civilian men, women and children in Zanzibar). Ali Sultani said he used to personally drive Carlucci around during his visits there. Meanwhile, back in Stonetown (the old town on the main island), Carlucci used to be in the habit of jogging around town in the pre-dawn hours and would usually stop by the back door of Ali Sultani's house for an hour or so, "until neighbors complained...and fellow revolutionaries began questioning." (NOTE: Ali Sultani's close personal relationship with U.S. diplomats at the time (in modern times he has been a house guest in the U.S. of both Petersen and Carlucci) should not be confused with being pro-American per se: in the same conversation with ZAO, Ali Sultani boasted that he was the principal actor to push the Revolutionary Government to get rid of the Project Mercury station that existed on Zanzibar at that time. END NOTE)

HERO OF THE REVOLUTION

18. By the end of 1964, now the Minister of Education of the Revolutionary Government, Ali Sultani gained popularity by securing scholarships for young Zanzibaris among Comintern countries and, later, China. As a delegate to a UNCTAD Conference in Geneva, Ali Sultani met Roberto Mondlane and befriended Che Guevara. About Mondlane, Ali Sultani said that he later ran into him in China but he tried to avoid him as much as he could because "everyone thought he was working for the Americans. After all, he had an American wife and was pretty much of a moderate, while everyone knew that Samora Machel was the real revolutionary." Ali Sultani also claimed that while he was in Geneva, he and his friend Babu were offered USD\$10,000 by "American agents." Ali Sultani told Babu that he should take it since "it didn't change anything." So they did, splitting the money three ways: Babu used the money to pay for his travels to the UK, and Ali Sultani returned to Zanzibar where he gave the remaining third to President Karume.

¶9. In 1965, Che Guavera passed by Zanzibar to "visit his old friend" Ali Sultani. Ali Sultani proudly showed ZAO pictures of Che and him posing around various spots on the island. Ali Sultani said that every year Castro still sent him greeting cards for Revolution Day, and last year he went to Cuba for some minor surgery at the invite of Fidel Castro.

¶10. By the end of the decade, things were turning sour for Ali Sultani and for the Revolution. Having served as a party cadre, founder of the Communist Umma Party, Commissar for Pemba, Zanzibari diplomat and Minister of Education, by 1970 Ali Sultani was Minister of Health. He had picked as his Deputy a younger party member named Hussein Ali Hassan Mwinyi, who "although born and raised on the mainland, his family was from Zanzibar, and I knew his parents. I hired him because he was part of the Revolution. However, Mwinyi always had a hard time with the others, who "suspected" him since he was from the mainland." Later, "just before things started to happen," Ali Sultani said he got Mwinyi a good party job in the mainland to protect him.

"WHO KILLED KARUME? WE DID!"

¶11. By the '70's, Ali Sultani and his Umma colleagues were starting to grow depressed. There was a chronic food shortage, and the public health situation, under his watch, was deteriorating. "Karume," he said, "was moving too fast. Change had to be gradual. Furthermore, some of the decisions of the Revolutionary Government just did not make sense. There did not seem to be a systematic nor scientific approach toward social change, and the way in which decisions were being made became more and more obscure." His comrades of the Umma began to talk about how to re-align the Revolution back toward its "historical course."

¶12. Ali Sultani said any number of people would have eagerly done-in Karume, but as far as he knew, the triggerman was "a young guy whose father had killed a politician during the British mandate"

DAR ES SAL 00000127 003 OF 004

(presumably the victim was a member of the nascent Afro-Shirazi party and presumably the crime was part of a non-political dispute).

After the Revolution, Karume never let the convict out of prison like all the others. After completing his sentence, the man died shortly after his release, leaving a widow and a bitter orphaned son. While the assassin's motive might have been revenge, for the Umma plotters the plan was that after Karume was out of the way, the Army would rise up to restore order and restart the "proper revolution."

¶13. Ali Sultani said the idea was sound, but there had been no real prep work done with the masses beforehand. "The whole thing was unscientific, in fact hare-brained." Ali Sultani claimed to have had nothing to do with implementing any of it. When Karume was killed, the army kept still, but the East German Stasi-trained internal police went to work with vigor. Ali Sultani complained that as a diplomat and Minister of Education, it was he who had first made the introductions and engineered the first exchanges between Zanzibar and East Germany. However, by 1970 the educational scholarships had dried and "the only real export of the DDR was security. By 1970," Ali Sultani said, "for every conversation involving three people, one was an agent."

¶14. Ali Sultani was arrested while he and his wife were watching an evening movie at the Cine Afrique in Stonetown. Two days later, Ali Mzee Ali (ref A; current Zanzibar House of Representatives Chairman) was tossed in with him, and the two were cellmates for a number of years. Ali Sultani was held for eight years and treated badly. He said he was beaten unconscious and almost died four times. He said he confessed to all sorts of crimes, but, in the end, because of his resilience, his captors let him write his own confession used for his trial, the only one of the dozens of conspirators allowed to do so, he claimed proudly. While relating this part of the story to ZAO, Ali Sultani picked up a small reed from the ground and showed how he used to hunt and kill flies in his cell, boasting that he killed more flies than any one else in his cell bloc. To this day, Ali Sultani seems frail beyond his years, walks with a stoop, and has difficulty holding multiple items or navigating stairs.

EXILE

¶15. In 1980 Ali Sultani was released and deported. While in jail he said he came to terms with his Islamic faith, and upon leaving Tanzania made the Haj to Mecca and then went to Britain to "recuperate." ZAO asked whether during his '80's UK exile if Ali Sultani ever connected with Oscar Kambona (Nyerere's right hand man during the Tanzania decolonization experience who fell from favor, was exiled, and who was reported to be planning a putsch until he died in 1997). Ali Sultani spat and said "No way! Kambona was a racist! He, too, was at that 1957 USSR Youth Conference, as a rep for TANU. He did not accept me as a Zanzibari, instead calling me an Arab. He threw me out of the Pan-African dormitory, and I had to room with the Somalis in an off-campus apartment at my own expense!"

¶16. Ali Sultani had by then taken a British wife, but left her and drifted back to Zanzibar in the late '80s. As a convicted "traitor to the Revolution," his return was illegal, but his presence was apparently tolerated so long as he kept a low profile. His rehabilitation occurred when Ali Hassan Mwinyi (Ali Sultani's old deputy at the Zanzibari Ministry of Health) became President of Tanzania and returned to Zanzibar for a "victory lap." Ali Sultani said he was driving in a remote part of Zanzibar's interior when Mwinyi's vast motorcade approached. Ali Sultani said he pulled over, stood by the side of the road and saluted. Mwinyi saw him from the tinted window of his limo, recognized him, stopped the motorcade and doubled back. The two hugged each other on the side of the road. Ali Sultani said Mwinyi's strap-hangers were shocked to see the President embrace a "known traitor," but news of the event spread and people no longer shunned him. Nonetheless, to this day established, mainstream politicians of all stripes - except Ali Mzee Ali-- continue to hold him at arm's length.

NOW AND THE FUTURE

¶17. Ali Sultani used his connections to Mwinyi and the "Revolution veteran's network" to acquire land and build two hotels. He is financially comfortable, if not rich, and lives inland in a modest cottage in the "middle class" Zanzibari suburb of Bububu. There he counsels young wannabe politicians, "only when asked," and settles

DAR ES SAL 00000127 004 OF 004

local disputes, sponsors weddings and sometimes gives money to both the CCM and CUF, although he claims he would never join either party. Nonetheless, when ZAO met him, Ali Sultani wore a solid green polo shirt (the colors of CCM). When asked about that, Ali Sultani merely grinned broadly and lit another cigarette.

¶18. Even when pushed, Ali Sultani stated flatly that CCM would win in 2010 "no matter what." Ali Sultani sees opposition CUF as "birds of a feather" with CCM, or put another way, "as CCM without any (courage)." Since both parties were so close in ideology, Ali Sultani said he might support CUF "as CCM reformers," if it were not for CUF Zanzibari leader Seif Hamad, whom Ali Sultani reviles. "If they could choose a better leader, they might go somewhere," he said.

¶19. Ali Sultani would not be drawn out into a conversation about the present CCM internal squabble nor about who might be CCM's Presidential candidate in 2010 (Karume's term is term-limited). He did say, however, that reconciliation of the parties (and of the two islands of Pemba and Unguja) was "essential". What was needed was a true national government, "so we can at last fight for an independent nation and fulfill the goals of our revolution."

¶20. Ali Sultani is working with an American academic and hopes to publish his autobiography later in the year. End Comment.

ANDRE